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Magic, Myth and Multilinguilism: The Echo of the Indian Knowledge System in the Language and Style of Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor

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Abstract— *The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has long shaped the country's literary traditions, influencing storytelling structures, linguistic diversity, and stylistic choices. This paper explores how Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor incorporate magic, myth, and multilingualism into their works, reflecting the epistemological and narrative frameworks of IKS. Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Tharoor's The Riotand*The Great Indian Novel*serve as primary texts, analyzed through the lens of oral traditions, intertextuality, mythological allegories, and code-switching. The study highlights how Rushdie's magical realism and Tharoor's historical intertextuality parallel ancient Indian storytelling, where myth and history intertwine seamlessly. Additionally, their extensive use of Indian languages, Sanskritized English, and cultural symbolism demonstrates the deep-rooted impact of IKS on their linguistic and stylistic innovations. By examining their narrative techniques, this paper argues that Rushdie and Tharoor do not merely write in English but rather "Indianize" the language, preserving indigenous literary traditions within global discourse.*

Keywords— ***Chutnification, Heteroglossia, Indian Knowledge System, Intertextuality, Magic Realism, Midnight's Children, Multilinguilism, Postcolonial Literature, Riot, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, The Great Novel.***

Indian Knowledge System (IKS): An Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a vast and diverse intellectual tradition that has shaped India's literature, philosophy, and linguistic heritage for centuries. Rooted in ancient scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, IKS embraces a multidimensional approach to knowledge, integrating history, mythology, ethics, and linguistics.

India has always been a land of stories—where history and myth blend seamlessly, and where languages flow into one another like rivers meeting the sea.Language plays a vital role in IKS, as India has always been a multilingual civilization where Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil, Persian, and many regional languages have coexisted and influenced each other. This has led to a rich tradition of code-mixing, metaphorical storytelling, and poetic expression. Stylistically, Indian literature is known for its non-linear narratives, symbolism, allegory, and oral storytelling techniques, which continue to influence modern writers.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* brings alive India's past through magical realism and a chaotic, non-linear narrative, much like the oral tales of the past. Similarly, Tharoor's *The Riot* reflects the multivocal nature of Indian storytelling, where different perspectives merge to create a larger truth.

By blending magic, myth, and multilingualism, contemporary authors like Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor carry forward the essence of IKS in their works, using language not just as a tool for communication but as a reflection of India's diverse cultural and intellectual heritage.

Salman Rushdie :

Salman Rushdie is a British-Indian novelist known for his postcolonial narratives, magical realism, and intricate storytelling, which often reflect the cultural and historical complexity of India. Born in 1947, the year of India's independence, Rushdie's works frequently explore themes of identity, myth, history, and linguistic hybridity.

His landmark novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), won the Booker Prize and is considered one of the greatest literary works of modern times. The novel interweaves myth, magic, and multilingualism, reflecting India's transition from colonial rule to independence through the protagonist's mystical connection with history. His controversial work, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), sparked global debates on freedom of expression and religious narratives, further highlighting his engagement with myth and reinterpretation of cultural texts.

Rushdie's unique style, influenced by Indian oral storytelling, Persian epics, and Western literary traditions, makes his works a powerful echo of the Indian Knowledge System. His novels often blur the lines between fact and fiction, past and present, realism and fantasy, embodying the essence of India's multilingual and mythic literary landscape.

Shashi Tharoor :

Shashi Tharoor is an Indian author, diplomat, and politician known for his erudite writing, historical reinterpretations, and postcolonial perspectives. A prolific writer, his works seamlessly blend myth, history, politics, and multilingualism, reflecting the deep intellectual traditions of the Indian Knowledge System.

His acclaimed novel, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), is a modern retelling of the Mahabharata, reimagining India's independence movement and postcolonial struggles through mythological allegory. Another notable work, *Riot* (2001), explores communal tensions, historical memory, and linguistic diversity, offering a nuanced portrayal of India's pluralistic identity.

Tharoor's literary style is characterized by linguistic hybridity, intertextual references to Indian epics, and a fusion of the mystical with the political. His works serve as a bridge between India's ancient knowledge traditions and contemporary socio-political realities, making him a significant voice in postcolonial literature.

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN: A LINGUISTIC PATCHWORK -

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a literary masterpiece that blends magic, myth, and multilingualism, echoing the storytelling traditions of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Through its non-linear narrative, historical allegory, and linguistic hybridity, the novel recreates an "Indianized" version of the English language, reflecting the cultural and epistemological depth of Indian literature.

1. **Magic: The Intersection of History and Fantasy**

Midnight's Children is a quintessential example of magical realism, a literary style where supernatural elements coexist seamlessly with everyday reality, blurring the line between the reality and the fantasy. Unlike traditional fantasy, magical realism presents extraordinary events as part of normal life, making the impossible seem natural.

Rushdie employs magical realism not just as a stylistic choice but as a symbolic device to depict the chaotic, fragmented nature of postcolonial India. Saleem Sinai, the novel's protagonist, is born at the exact moment of India's independence linking his fate to the nation's destiny. He possesses telepathic abilities that connect him to 1,000 other "midnight's children." His heightened sense of smell, his ability to hear voices in his head, and his eventual disintegration into 600 million pieces shows India's transformation, both politically and culturally.Saleem is convinced that the events in his life, whether caused by him or not, are always intertwined with the key events in the history of the nation.

Among 1000 "midnight's children" is Tai Bibi, a 512-year-old woman who claims the ability to assume the body odor of any person, a feat that defies rational explanation , which is a surreal element. The novel also introduces Saleem's mother's irrational fear of giving birth to a baby with a cauliflower instead of a brain, further blurring the line between reality and fantasy.

Perhaps the most notable magical realist element is Saleem Sinai's telepathic power and later, his unique ability to "smell" people's emotions. This extraordinary gift, inherited from his grandfather Aadam Aziz and symbolized by the family's large, magical noses, plays a pivotal role in the plot. Notably, Aadam Aziz's prominent nose saves him from death during the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, again intertwining personal history with national events in a magical yet meaningful way.

Magic in *Midnight's Children* is not merely a fantastical element but a symbolic representation of India's chaotic and diverse reality. This use of magical realism, inspired by the oral traditions of Indian storytelling, allows Rushdie to depict history through a lens that merges the real and the surreal, much like themythological narratives in the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

2. Myth: Rewriting Indian History Through Storytelling

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie constructs a mythic retelling of India's history, blending personal memory, national history, and fantastical elements to create a narrative style deeply influenced by Indian epics and oral storytelling traditions. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, emerges as a modern mythic hero, much like Karna from the *Mahabharata*, whose destiny is intertwined with larger cosmic and historical forces. His life is governed by fate, coincidence, and supernatural abilities, mirroring the structure of Indian mythology, where individuals are often seen as instruments of divine will rather than independent agents.

Another striking parallel to Indian mythology is Rushdie's use of cyclical time and narrative repetition. In the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, history is often presented in recurring cycles, where past events shape the present and future. Similarly, Saleem's life mirrors the history of India, reinforcing the idea that personal and national destinies are intertwined and repetitive. His eventual fragmentation into 600 millionpieces symbolizes the disintegration of a once-unified India, much like how the epics narrate the inevitable fall of dynasties and the cycle of rebirth and renewal.

Furthermore, Rushdie mythologizes political events, transforming historical figures into larger-than-life characters. Indira Gandhi is depicted as the Widow, a figure reminiscent of mythological villains—powerful yet shadowy, much like the Surpanakha in the *Ramayana*. This mythological representation turns history into legend, reinforcing the fluid boundary between fact and fictionin Indian storytelling traditions.

3. Multilingualism: The Indianization of English and Chutnification of Language

Rushdie's linguistic style in *Midnight's Children* is a prime example of chutnification, a term he coined to describe the spicing up and transformation of the English language with Indian influences. His writing is infused with Hinglish (Hindi + English), Urdu, and regional dialects, making English a vessel for Indian linguistic and cultural expression.

Some key examples of multilingualism and chutnification in the novel include:

Hinglish and Code-Switching: Code-switching is when a person switches between two or more languages or language varieties in a conversation. Rushdie frequently mixes Hindi, Urdu, and English, forcing readers into an Indian linguistic landscape. For instance:

- "Arrey baba, don't be mad!" (*Arrey* is a Hindi exclamation, and*baba* is an affectionate or respectful address.)
- "What to do, yaar?" (Common Indian English phrase, blendingHinglish syntax and vocabulary.)
- 'ekdum' (at once)
- 'angrez' (Englishman)
- 'phut-aphut' (in no time)
- 'nasbandi' (sterilization)
- 'dhoban' (washerwoman)
- 'feringee' (foreigner)
- 'garam masala' (hot spices)
- 'rakshasas' (demons)
- 'fauj' (army)
- 'badmaas' (rogues)
- 'jailkhana' (prison)
- 'baap-re-baap' (oh, my father)
- 'jalebis' (a type of sweet)
- 'barfi' (a milk-based sweet)
- 'bhel-puri' (a popular savory snack).

Literal Translations of Indian Idioms: Instead of using traditional English phrases, Rushdie directly translates Indian expressions, maintaining their cultural essence:

- "Jungle of noises" (from the Hindi phrase*shor ka jungle*).
- "Eating one's own words" (inspired by*apne shabd kha jaana*in Hindi).

Use of Indian Honorifics and Speech Patterns:

- Saleem's grandmother uses phrases like "Allah re Allah!", a direct borrowing from Urdu expressions of shock or prayer.
- Words like "chhi-chhi" (a sound of disapproval in Hindi) are sprinkled naturally into the English prose.

Oral Storytelling Rhythm and Repetition:

Rushdie's prose mirrors Indian oral storytelling, where repetition and exaggerated descriptions create a musical rhythm:

- ..'Ra-pist! Ra-pist! Ray-ray-ray-*pist!*" (99)
- "I hope you are com-for-table! Or are you come-for-tea? Oh, joke-joke, ladies and ladahs…" (135)
- "Look, baap-re-baap! Look , Madam!" (171)
- The eyes were too blue: Kashmiri-blue, changeling blue, blue with the weight of unspilled tears, too blue to blink." (171)
- "O feeble excuse of telephonic voice! O transparent flummery of ghosts! (220)

- "The voice on the phone was no truck-renter's voice; it was soft, a little fleshy, the voice of a poet…" (220)

The Chutney Metaphor:

Saleem, in the latter part of the novel, becomes obsessed with making and eating chutney, a metaphor for his own act of storytelling. Just as chutney is made by grinding together various ingredients, his narrative blends languages, myths, and histories into one composite whole. He even states:

> "Chutney and oratory, theology and curiosity : these are the things that saved me..." (124)

This culinary metaphor perfectly captures how Rushdie remixes language, myth, and history into a rich, flavorful, and distinctly Indian storytelling style.

RIOT & THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL : A RICH TAPESTRY

Shashi Tharoor, known for his eloquent prose and deep engagement with Indian history and culture, weaves togethermagic, myth, and multilingualism in his novels *Riot*and *The Great Indian Novel*. While his works do not employ magical realismin the same way as SalmanRushdie's *Midnight's Children*, they containa metaphorical magic, where history, politics, and myth merge to create a richly layered narrative. His use of mythological structuresand multilingual storytelling reinforces the influence of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) on his literary style.

1. Magic: The Symbolic and Metaphorical Magic of Storytelling

Unlike Rushdie's supernatural elements, Tharoor's "magic" lies in his narrative technique**,** where history and fiction are blended seamlessly, making real events feel mythical and mythical elements feel real**.**

In *Riot*, the "magic" is in the fragmented storytelling, where the same event—the mysterious murder of an American woman, Priscilla Hart—is seen from multiple perspectives. Each version is subjective**,** creating an illusion of multiple truths, much like how different Puranas offer varying interpretations of the same mythological stories. The novel's non-linear narrative and shifts between newspaper articles, diary entries, and official reports distort time and reality, creating a sense of historical ambiguity—a technique reminiscent of Indian oral traditions.

In *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor recreates the Indian epic *Mahabharata*in the form of **a** political satire, turning historical figures from India's independence movement into mythic heroes. Here, the "magic" lies in reimagining contemporary history as an epic, where real-life leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi are cast as mythological characters. For example:

- Dhritarashtra = Jawaharlal Nehru **(**A blind king leading a blind nation**)**
- Duryodhana = Indira Gandhi(A ruler with absolute control)
- Ved Vyas = Shashi Tharoor himself, playing the narrator, much like the sage Vyasa in the *Mahabharata*

This "epicization" of history mirrors the way Indian myth-making transforms historical events into legendary tales**,** reflecting the deep interplay between history and mythology in IKS.

2. Myth: Retelling the Past Through Epic and Legend

Tharoor's works are deeply mythological**,** both in theirnarrative structureand characterization**.**

The Great Indian Novel is the most explicit example of mythological storytelling**,** whereIndian history from British colonial rule to post-independence politics is narrated in the form of the *Mahabharata*.By using this mythic framework, Tharoor suggests that India's political history is a repeating cycle of power struggles, conflicts, and betrayals—just like in epics.

Riot follows a different mythological approach, where the theme of fate and karma plays a crucial role. The riots and communal violence are portrayed as part of a larger cosmic cycle**,** reflecting thedeterministic view of history seen in Hindu philosophy. The death of Priscilla Hart is not just a random event—it is deeply tied to the political and religious tensions of the town, much like how individual destinies in Hindu epics are shaped by larger cosmic and social forces.

Other Mythological Elements in Tharoor's Works:

Intertextual References to Epics and Scriptures

- *The Great Indian Novel* directly adapts characters and events from the *Mahabharata*, making Indian mythology a lens through which modern history is reinterpreted.
- In *Riot*, characters frequently refer to Hindu scriptures and mythic archetypes, reinforcing the idea that past and present are deeply intertwined.

Repetitive Patterns of History as a Mythic Cycle

The idea that history repeats itself, seen in both books, is inspired by the cyclical nature of time in Hindu philosophy (Yugas and Kalpas)**.**

Just as the *Mahabharata* tells of dynastic struggles that shape civilizations, *The Great Indian Novel* suggests that

Indian politics is destined to repeat the same power struggles, betrayals, and ideological battles.

Tharoor's writing reflects India's linguistic diversity, making his novels a perfect example of the Indian Knowledge System's multilingual heritage. His characters seamlessly switch between English, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Urdu, mirroring how language functions in Indian society. Unlike Rushdie's experimental and playful English, Tharoor's prose carries a sophisticated, historical, and political depth, shaped by both colonial and indigenous influences.

3. Multilingualism : Voices in Harmony

Mixing Hindi, English, and Sanskrit to Reflect Indian Speech Patterns

Riot is set in Uttar Pradesh, where people naturally mix Hindi and English. Tharoor captures this through code-switching, making dialogues feel authentic.

Examples:

- Use of the phrase "Satyamev Jayate" along with its English translation "Truth Alone Triumps"
- Use of the words "dharma"(moral duty) and "yudh" (war) are used without translation, assuming the reader will grasp their deeper Indian meanings.
- "tantra" (a set of spiritual practices)
- "tandava" (a divine dance performed by Hindu god Shiva)
- "special puja" (special worship/prayer)
- "Swamiji"(A religious teacher)
- "lassi" (A traditional yogurt drink)
- "nimbu-pani" (Lemonade/Fresh lime juice)
- "New York Journal-wallah" (The New York Journalist)
- "Foreign presswallahs" (Foreign press people)
- "Meetha Mohammad" and "Sweet Mohammad" (Name of a teaseller boy)

Indian lexis v/s West lexis

The novel highlights the linguistic divide between English-speaking elites and Hindi-speaking locals, showing how language reflects cultural differences.

Example:

- The contrast between the words like "Bharat" (India in Hindi/Sanskrit) and "Hindutva" (a political ideology) and "Sanatan" (a synonym for Hinduism) versus words like "English speakers" , "Foreigner" reflects the theme of cultural differences between India and the West (America).

Use of Urdu and Persian Influence in Speech

Some characters in *Riot* speak with Urdu-inflected Hindi, adding another layer of linguistic richness.

Example:

- "Na samjhogey to mit jaogey aye Hindostan walon / Tumhari dastaan tak bhi na raheygi dastanon mein." (Urdu poet Iqbal's lines) along with its English translation "If you don't understand, O you Indian, you will be destroyed. Your story will not remain in the world's treasury of stories."

Blending Persian-Urdu with Sanskrit for Political Satire -

Tharoor merges Persian, Urdu, and Sanskrit words to highlight India's linguistic diversity in Example:

- Words like deshbhakti (patriotism), rashtra (nation), satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), and nyaya (justice) are used instead of English equivalents, emphasizing India's indigenous philosophy.
- Use of the English-Hindi words together "Zero , *shunya , bindu".*
- Urdu Words like "pahelwans" , "jawans" , "*Khidmatgar*"
- Use of the symbol of Om "ॐ" in *The Great Indian Novel* before beginning the work shows his deeply rooted Indianness and reverence to Indian culture and tradition.
- In *Riot*, Lakshman says –

  "My own father taught me the Vedic sloka "Aa no bhadrah kratvo yantu vishwatah" – "Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions of the universe."" (146)
- Also the sloka "Ekam sad viprah bahuda vadanti" – "Truth is one , the sages give it various names." (147)

The Chutney Effect: Mixing Cultures, Languages, and Ideas -

- Tharoor doesn't just translate languages—he blends them into one fluid, hybrid form of Indianized English.
- This "chutnification" of English creates a unique textual "thali" (platter) of words from multiple traditions.

CONCLUSION

The novels of Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor show how India's rich knowledge, culture, and languages shape

storytelling**.** By usingmagic, myth, and multilingualism, they create a unique style that blends history with imagination, making their stories feel both real and magical at the same time.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie brings together magic, myth, and multilingualism to create a unique storytelling style deeply connected to India's literary traditions. His use of magical realism blends fantasy with real historical events, making the past feel alive in a new way. By retelling history like a myth, he shows how personal and national stories are closely linked.Through these techniques, *Midnight's Children* reflects the rich and diverse nature of Indian storytelling, proving that history, myth, and language are always connected.

While Tharoor's *Riot* and *The Great Indian Novel* mix historical facts, Sanskrit traditions, and multiple languagesto retell India's past in a fresh way. Both authors break away from Western styles and make English their own by adding Indian words, expressions, and storytelling traditions**.**Their writing proves that language is more than just words—it carries identity, history, and knowledge**.** By using India'**s** many languages and myths, Rushdie and Tharoor give voice to India's deep cultural heritage in modern literature. Their work ensures that India's stories and wisdom continue to be heard worldwide, in a style that is truly Indian ,echoing the essence of Indian Knowledge System.

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